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Common variants in ABCA7, MS4A6A/MS4A4E, EPHA1, CD33 and CD2AP are associated with Alzheimer's disease

Paul Hollingworth^{1,109}, Denise Harold^{1,109}, Rebecca Sims^{1,109}, Amy Gerrish^{1,109}, Jean-Charles Lambert^{2,3,4,109}, Minerva M Carrasquillo^{5,109}, Richard Abraham¹, Marian L Hamshire¹, Jaspreet Singh Pahwa¹, Valentina Moskvina¹, Kimberley Dowzell¹, Nicola Jones¹, Alexandra Stretton¹, Charlene Thomas¹, Alex Richards¹, Dobril Ivanov¹, Caroline Widdowson¹, Jade Chapman¹, Simon Lovestone^{6,7}, John Powell⁷, Petroula Proitsi⁷, Michelle K Lupton⁷, Carol Brayne⁸, David C Rubinsztein⁹, Michael Gill¹⁰, Brian Lawlor¹⁰, Aoibhinn Lynch¹⁰, Kristelle S Brown¹¹, Peter A Passmore¹², David Craig¹², Bernadette McGuinness¹², Stephen Todd¹², Clive Holmes¹³, David Mann¹⁴, A David Smith¹⁵, Helen Beaumont¹⁵, Donald Warden¹⁵, Gordon Wilcock¹⁶, Seth Love¹⁷, Patrick G Kehoe¹⁷, Nigel M Hooper¹⁸, Emma R. L. C. Vardy^{14,18,19}, John Hardy^{20,21}, Simon Mead²², Nick C Fox²², Martin Rossor²², John Collinge²², Wolfgang Maier^{23,24}, Frank Jessen²³, Britta Schürmann^{23,26}, Eckart Rütger^{24,25,26}, Reiner Heun^{23,27}, Heike Kölsch²³, Hendrik van den Bussche²⁸, Isabella Heuser²⁹, Johannes Kornhuber³⁰, Jens Wiltfang³¹, Martin Dichgans^{32,33}, Lutz Frölich³⁴, Harald Hampel³⁵, Michael Hüll³⁶, John Gallacher³⁶, Dan Rujescu³⁵, Ina Giegling³⁵, Alison M Goate^{37,38,39}, John S K Kauwe⁴⁰, Carlos Cruchaga³⁷, Petra Nowotny³⁷, John C Morris³⁸, Kevin Mayo³⁷, Kristel Slegers^{41,42}, Karolien Bettens^{41,42}, Sebastiaan Engelborghs^{41,43}, Peter P De Deyn^{41,43}, Christine Van Broeckhoven^{41,42}, Gill Livingston⁴⁴, Nicholas J Bass⁴⁴, Hugh Gurling⁴⁴, Andrew McQuillin⁴⁴, Rhian Gwilliam⁴⁵, Panagiotis Deloukas⁴⁵, Ammar Al-Chalabi⁴⁶, Christopher E Shaw⁴⁶, Magda Tsolaki⁴⁷, Andrew B Singleton⁴⁸, Rita Guerreiro⁴⁸, Thomas W Mühleisen^{49,50}, Markus M Nöthen^{25,49,50}, Susanne Moebus⁵¹, Karl-Heinz Jöckel⁵¹, Norman Klopp⁵², H-Erich Wichmann^{52,53,54}, V Shane Pankratz⁵⁵, Sigrid B Sando^{56,57}, Jan O Aasly^{56,57}, Maria Barcikowska⁵⁸, Zbigniew K Wszolek⁵⁹, Dennis W Dickson⁵, Neill R Graff-Radford^{5,59}, Ronald C Petersen^{60,61}, the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative⁶², Cornelia M van Duijn^{63,64}, Monique MB Breteler^{63,64}, M Arfan Ikram^{63,64}, Anita L

[†]Corresponding authors.

¹⁰⁹These authors contributed equally to this work.

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Competing financial Interests The authors have applied for a patent based on the results of this research

DeStefano^{65,66}, Annette L Fitzpatrick⁶⁷, Oscar Lopez^{68,69}, Lenore J Launer⁷⁰, Sudha Seshadri^{66,71}, CHARGE consortium, Claudine Berr⁷², Dominique Campion⁷³, Jacques Epelbaum⁷⁴, Jean-François Dartigues⁷⁵, Christophe Tzourio⁷⁶, Annick Alperovitch⁷⁶, Mark Lathrop^{77,78}, EADI1 consortium, Thomas M Feulner⁷⁹, Patricia Friedrich⁷⁹, Caterina Riehle⁷⁹, Michael Krawczak^{80,81,82}, Stefan Schreiber^{81,82}, Manuel Mayhaus⁷⁹, S Nicolhaus⁸², Stefan Wagenpfeil⁸³, Stacy Steinberg⁸⁴, Hreinn Stefansson⁸⁴, Kari Stefansson⁸⁵, Jon Snædal⁸⁶, Sigurbjörn Björnsson⁸⁶, Palmi V. Jonsson⁸⁶, Vincent Chouraki^{2,3,4}, Benjamin Genier-Boley^{2,3,4}, Mikko Hiltunen⁸⁷, Hilkkä Soininen⁸⁷, Onofre Combarros^{88,89}, Diana Zelenika⁹⁰, Marc Delepine⁹⁰, Maria J Bullido^{89,91}, Florence Pasquier^{4,92}, Ignacio Mateo^{88,89}, Ana Frank-Garcia^{89,93}, Elisa Porcellini⁹⁴, Olivier Hanon⁹⁵, Eliecer Coto⁹⁶, Victoria Alvarez⁹⁶, Paolo Bosco⁹⁷, Gabriele Siciliano⁹⁸, Michelangelo Mancuso⁹⁸, Francesco Panza⁹⁹, Vincenzo Solfrizzi⁹⁹, Benedetta Nacmias¹⁰⁰, Sandro Sorbi¹⁰⁰, Paola Bossù¹⁰¹, Paola Piccardi¹⁰², Beatrice Arosio¹⁰³, Giorgio Annoni¹⁰⁴, Davide Seripa¹⁰⁵, Alberto Pilotto¹⁰⁵, Elio Scarpini¹⁰⁶, Daniela Galimberti¹⁰⁶, Alexis Brice¹⁰⁷, Didier Hannequin¹⁰⁸, Federico Licastro⁹⁴, Lesley Jones¹, Peter A Holmans¹, Thorlakur Jonsson⁸⁴, Matthias Riemenschneider⁷⁹, Kevin Morgan¹¹, Steven G Younkin⁵, Michael J Owen¹, Michael O'Donovan^{1,†}, Philippe Amouyel^{2,3,4,92}, and Julie Williams^{1,†}

¹Medical Research Council (MRC) Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics, Department of Psychological Medicine and Neurology, School of Medicine, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK. ²Inserm U744, F-59019 Lille, France. ³Institut Pasteur de Lille, F-59019, Lille, France. ⁴Université de Lille Nord de France, F-59000 Lille, France. ⁵Department of Neuroscience, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Jacksonville, Florida, USA. ⁶National Institute for Health Research Biomedical Research Centre for Mental Health at the South London and Maudsley National Health Service Foundation Trust and Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, UK. ⁷Department of Neuroscience, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, UK. ⁸Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. ⁹Cambridge Institute for Medical Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. ¹⁰Mercer's Institute for Research on Aging, St. James Hospital and Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. ¹¹Institute of Genetics, Queen's Medical Centre, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK. ¹²Ageing Group, Centre for Public Health, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, Queen's University Belfast, UK. ¹³Division of Clinical Neurosciences, School of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK. ¹⁴Neurodegeneration and Mental Health Research Group, School of Community Based Medicine, University of Manchester, Hope Hospital, Stott Lane, Salford, Manchester, UK. ¹⁵Oxford Project to Investigate Memory and Ageing (OPTIMA), University of Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, UK. ¹⁶Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine, Medical Sciences Division, University of Oxford, Headington, Oxford. OX3 7BN. UK. ¹⁷Dementia Research Group, University of Bristol Institute of Clinical Neurosciences, Frenchay Hospital, Bristol, UK. ¹⁸Institute of Molecular and Cellular Biology, Faculty of Biological Sciences, LIGHT Laboratories, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK. ¹⁹Cerebral Function Unit, Salford Royal NHS Trust, Stott Lane, Salford, M6 8HD, UK. ²⁰Department of Molecular Neuroscience, Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²¹Reta Lilla Weston Laboratories, Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²²Department of Neurodegenerative Disease, UCL Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²³Department of Psychiatry, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁴German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases, Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁵Institute for Molecular Psychiatry, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁶Department of Psychiatry, University of Göttingen, Germany. ²⁷Department of Psychiatry, Royal Derby Hospital, Derby, DE22 3WQ, UK. ²⁸Institute of Primary Medical Care, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany. ²⁹Department of Psychiatry, Charité Berlin, Berlin, Germany. ³⁰Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. ³¹Landschaftsverband Rheinland-Hospital Essen, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany. ³²Department of Neurology, Klinikum der Universität München, Munich,

Germany. ³³Institute for Stroke and Dementia Research, Klinikum der Universität München, Munich, Germany. ³⁴Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, Central Institute of Mental Health, Medical Faculty Mannheim, University of Heidelberg, Mannheim, Germany. ³⁵Department of Psychiatry, Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt, Germany. ³⁶Department of Primary Care and Public Health, School of Medicine, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK. ³⁷Department of Psychiatry, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. ³⁸Department of Neurology, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. ³⁹Department of Genetics, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. ⁴⁰Department of Biology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA. ⁴¹Institute Born-Bunge and University of Antwerp, Antwerpen, Belgium. ⁴²Neurodegenerative Brain Diseases group, Department of Molecular Genetics, VIB, Antwerpen, Belgium. ⁴³Memory Clinic and Department of Neurology, ZNA Middelheim, Antwerpen, Belgium. ⁴⁴Department of Mental Health Sciences, University College London, UK. ⁴⁵The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, Hinxton, Cambridge, UK. ⁴⁶MRC Centre for Neurodegeneration Research, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry, London, UK. ⁴⁷Third Department of Neurology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece. ⁴⁸Laboratory of Neurogenetics, National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA. ⁴⁹Department of Genomics, Life & Brain Center, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ⁵⁰Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ⁵¹Institute for Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology, University Hospital of Essen, University Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany. ⁵²Institute of Epidemiology, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Neuherberg, Germany. ⁵³Institute of Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany. ⁵⁴Klinikum Grosshadern, Munich, Germany. ⁵⁵Division of Biomedical Statistics and Informatics, Mayo Clinic and Mayo Foundation, Rochester, Minnesota, USA. ⁵⁶Department of Neurology, St. Olav's Hospital, Edvard Griegs Gate 8, 7006 Trondheim, Norway. ⁵⁷Department of Neuroscience, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, 7491 Trondheim, Norway. ⁵⁸Department of Neurodegenerative Disorders, Medical Research Centre, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland. ⁵⁹Department of Neurology, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA. ⁶⁰Department of Neurology, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, MN 55905, USA. ⁶¹Mayo Alzheimer Disease Research Center, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, MN 55905, USA. ⁶²Data used in the preparation of this article were obtained from the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) database (www.loni.ucla.edu/ADNI). As such, the investigators within the ADNI contributed to the design and implementation of ADNI and/or provided data but did not participate in analysis or writing of this report. ADNI investigators include (complete listing available at www.loni.ucla.edu/ADNI/Collaboration/ADNI_Authorship_list.pdf). ⁶³Department of Epidemiology, Erasmus MC University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. ⁶⁴Netherlands Consortium for Healthy Aging, The Netherlands. ⁶⁵Departments of Neurology and Biostatistics, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. ⁶⁶The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Framingham Heart Study, Framingham, Massachusetts, USA. ⁶⁷Department of Epidemiology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA. ⁶⁸Department of Neurology, The Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. ⁶⁹Department of Psychiatry, The Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. ⁷⁰Neuroepidemiology Section, Laboratory of Epidemiology, Demography and Biometry (LJL), National Institute on Aging, Washington DC, USA. ⁷¹Department of Neurology, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. ⁷²Inserm U888, Hôpital La Colombière, Montpellier, France. ⁷³Inserm U614, Faculté de Médecine-Pharmacie de Rouen, Rouen, France. ⁷⁴UMR 894, Inserm Faculté de Médecine, Université Paris Descartes, Paris, France. ⁷⁵Inserm U897, Victor Segalen University, Bordeaux, France. ⁷⁶Inserm U708, Paris, France. ⁷⁷Centre

National de Genotypage, Institut Genomique, Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique, Evry, France. ⁷⁸Fondation Jean Dausset- CEPH, Paris, France. ⁷⁹Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Universitätsklinikum des Saarlandes, Universität des Saarlandes, Germany. ⁸⁰Institute of Medical Informatics and Statistics, Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel, Germany. ⁸¹Biobank Popgen, Institute of Experimental Medicine, Section of Epidemiology, Christian-Albrechts University, Kiel, Germany. ⁸²Institute for Clinical Molecular Biology, Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel, Germany. ⁸³Inst. of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology; Klinikum Rechts der Isar, TU-München, Germany. ⁸⁴deCODE Genetics, Reykjavik, Iceland. ⁸⁵deCODE Genetics and University of Iceland, Faculty of Medicine, Reykjavik, Iceland. ⁸⁶Faculty of Medicine, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland. ⁸⁷Department of Neurology, University of Eastern Finland and Kuopio University Hospital, 70211, Kuopio, Finland. ⁸⁸Neurology Service, "Marqués de Valdecilla" University Hospital (University of Cantabria), Santander, Spain. ⁸⁹CIBERNED, "Marqués de Valdecilla" University Hospital (University of Cantabria), Santander, Spain. ⁹⁰Centre National de Genotypage, Institut Genomique, Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique, Evry, France. ⁹¹Centro de Biología Molecular Severo Ochoa (CSIC-UAM, Universidad Autonoma, Campus de Cantoblanco, S-28049, Madrid, Spain. ⁹²Centre Hospitalier Régional Universitaire de Lille, Lille, France. ⁹³Servicio de Neurología, Hospital Universitario La Paz (UAM) 28034 Madrid, Spain. ⁹⁴Department of Experimental Pathology, School of Medicine, University of Bologna, Italy. ⁹⁵Departement de Geriatrie, CHU de Dijon, F-21000, Dijon, France. ⁹⁶Genetic Molecular Unit, Hospital Universitario Central de Asturias, 33006-Oviedo, Spain. ⁹⁷IRCCS Oasi Maria SS, 94018 Troina, Italy. ⁹⁸Department of Neuroscience, Neurological Clinic, University of Pisa, I-56100, Italy. ⁹⁹Department of Geriatrics, Center for Aging Brain, Memory Unit, University of Bari, Policlinico, 70124 Bari, Italy. ¹⁰⁰Department of Neurological and Psychiatric Sciences, University of Florence, 50134 Florence, Italy. ¹⁰¹Department of Clinical and Behavioral Neurology, IRCCS Santa Lucia Foundation, 00179 Roma, Italy. ¹⁰²Lab of Molecular Genetics, Section of Clinical Pharmacology, Department of Neuroscience, University of Cagliari, Italy. ¹⁰³Department of Internal Medicine, Università degli Studi di Milano, Fondazione IRCCS, Ospedale Maggiore, Mangiagalli e Regina Elena, Milan Italy. ¹⁰⁴Department of Clinical Medicine and Prevention, University of Milano-Bicocca, Monza Italy. ¹⁰⁵Geriatric Unit & Gerontology-Geriatric Research Laboratory, Department of Medical Science, IRCCS Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, San Giovanni Rotondo, I-71013, Italy. ¹⁰⁶Dept. of Neurological Sciences, University of Milan, 35 via F. Sforza, Milan, 20122, Italy. ¹⁰⁷Inserm, UMR_S679, Hopital de la salpêtrière, 75651 Paris, France. ¹⁰⁸Inserm U614, Faculté de Médecine-Pharmacie de Rouen, F-76183, Rouen, France.

Abstract

We sought to identify new susceptibility loci for Alzheimer's disease (AD) through a staged association study (GERAD+) and by testing suggestive loci reported by the Alzheimer's Disease Genetic Consortium (ADGC). First, we undertook a combined analysis of four genome-wide association datasets (Stage 1) and identified 10 novel variants with $P \leq 1 \times 10^{-5}$. These were tested for association in an independent sample (Stage 2). Three SNPs at two loci replicated and showed evidence for association in a further sample (Stage 3). Meta-analyses of all data provide compelling evidence that *ABCA7* (meta- $P = 4.5 \times 10^{-17}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 5.0 \times 10^{-21}$) and the *MS4A* gene cluster (rs610932, meta- $P = 1.8 \times 10^{-14}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 1.2 \times 10^{-16}$; rs670139, meta- $P = 1.4 \times 10^{-9}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 1.1 \times 10^{-10}$) are novel susceptibility loci for AD. Second, we observed independent evidence for association for three suggestive loci reported by the ADGC GWAS, which when combined shows genome-wide significance: *CD2AP* (GERAD+ $P = 8.0 \times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 8.6 \times 10^{-9}$), *CD33* (GERAD+ $P = 2.2 \times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 1.6 \times 10^{-9}$) and *EPHA1* (GERAD+ $P = 3.4 \times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P = 6.0 \times 10^{-10}$). These findings support five novel susceptibility genes for AD.

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia, with both environmental and genetic factors contributing to risk. AD is genetically complex and shows heritability up to 79%¹. Rare variants in three genes (*APP*, *PSEN1* & *PSEN2*)¹ cause disease in a minority of cases, but until recently the Apolipoprotein E gene (*APOE*), was the only gene known to increase disease risk for the common form of AD with late-onset². In 2009 we published a genome-wide association study (GWAS) of AD in a sample designated GERAD1 (Genetic and Environmental Risk in AD Consortium 1), which identified two new genome-wide significant susceptibility loci: clusterin (*CLU*; $P=8.5\times 10^{-10}$) and phosphatidylinositol-binding clathrin assembly protein gene (*PICALM*; $P=1.3\times 10^{-9}$). We also observed more variants with P -values $<1\times 10^{-5}$ than were expected by chance ($P=7.5\times 10^{-6}$)³. These included variants in the complement receptor 1 (*CRI*) gene, the bridging integrator 1 (*BINI*) gene and the membrane-spanning 4A gene cluster (*MS4A* gene cluster). A second independent AD GWAS by Lambert and colleagues⁴ using the EADI1 sample (European Alzheimer's Disease Initiative 1) showed genome-wide significant evidence for association with *CLU* ($P=7.5\times 10^{-9}$) and *CRI* ($P=3.7\times 10^{-9}$), and support for *PICALM* ($P=3\times 10^{-3}$). Combined analysis of the GERAD1 and EADI1 data yield highly significant support for all three loci (*CLU* meta- $P=6.7\times 10^{-16}$, *PICALM* meta- $P=6.3\times 10^{-9}$, *CRI* meta- $P=3.2\times 10^{-12}$). The associations in *CLU*, *PICALM* and *CRI* have since been replicated in several independent datasets⁵⁻⁸, shown trends in another⁹ and relationships with neurodegenerative processes underlying disease¹⁰. In addition, members of this consortium have since reported genome-wide significant association for *BINI* ($P=1.6\times 10^{-11}$) and support for ephrin receptor A1 (*EPHA1*; $P=1.7\times 10^{-6}$)¹¹.

This study sought to identify new common susceptibility variants for AD by first undertaking a three-stage association study based upon predominantly European samples (GERAD+, see Figure 1) and second, by testing these samples for loci showing suggestive evidence for association in the American Alzheimer's Disease Genetics Consortium (ADGC) GWAS¹².

The first stage of this study comprised a meta-analysis of four AD GWAS datasets (6688 cases, 13685 controls), including: GERAD1³, EADI1⁴, Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGEN1)¹³ and Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI)¹⁴. Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) which remained significant at $P=1\times 10^{-5}$ were then tested for replication in the second stage of this study, comprising 4896 cases and 4903 controls including genotyping of the GERAD2 sample and *in silico* replication in the deCODE and German Alzheimer's disease Integrated Genome Research Network (AD-IG) GWAS datasets. In Stage 3, novel SNPs showing significant evidence of replication in Stage 2 were then tested for association in a sample comprising 8286 cases and 21258 controls, which included new genotyping in the EADI2⁴ and Mayo2 samples, and *in silico* replication in the Cohorts for Heart and Aging Research in Genomic Epidemiology (CHARGE) sample¹¹. Sample descriptions and characteristics can be found in the Supplementary Note and Supplementary Table 1.

In Stage 1 we identified 61 SNPs associated with AD at $P=1\times 10^{-5}$ following meta-analysis of 496763 SNPs in the GERAD1, TGEN1, ADNI and EADI1 (see Supplementary Table 2 and the Supplementary Note). Ten SNPs at novel loci and two at previously identified susceptibility loci that surpassed the $P=1\times 10^{-5}$ threshold, were selected for further analysis (see below). One SNP, rs610932 (Stage 1 $P=1.8\times 10^{-8}$) at the *MS4A* (membrane spanning 4A) gene cluster, surpassed the threshold ($P<5.0\times 10^{-8}$)¹⁵ for genome-wide significance. We also observed strong evidence for association at *ABCA7* (ATP-binding cassette, sub-family A, member 7; rs3764650; Stage 1 $P=2.6\times 10^{-7}$).

When selecting SNPs for testing in Stage 2, we excluded known susceptibility loci that had previously been tested in GERAD2 and limited analysis of *BIN1* and *CR1*, which had not been tested in GERAD2, to the most significant SNPs at each locus (See Supplementary Table 2). Following pruning for linkage disequilibrium, twelve SNPs were taken forward for replication in Stage 2 (10 excluding *BIN1* and *CR1*).

Five of the twelve SNPs tested in Stage 2 showed significant evidence for replication using a Bonferroni adjusted threshold for significance of $P=4.2\times 10^{-3}$ (see Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3). In addition to SNPs at *BIN1* and *CR1*, one SNP within *ABCA7* (rs3764650, Stage 2 $P=1.9\times 10^{-5}$) and two SNPs at the *MS4A* gene cluster (rs610932, stage 2 $P=1.6\times 10^{-3}$; rs670139 Stage 2 $P=1.1\times 10^{-3}$) showed evidence of replication in Stage 2. The three SNPs implicating novel risk loci were tested for association in the Stage 3 sample and showed further evidence of replication (rs3764650, Stage 3 $P=2.9\times 10^{-7}$; rs610932, Stage 3 $P=2.1\times 10^{-5}$; rs670139, Stage 3 $P=3.2\times 10^{-3}$; see Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3).

We conducted an inverse variance weighted meta-analysis of data from Stages 1, 2 and 3 (See Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3). This provided strong evidence for association with rs3764650 at *ABCA7* (meta- $P=4.5\times 10^{-17}$) and two SNPs at the *MS4A* gene cluster: rs610932 (meta- $P=1.8\times 10^{-14}$) and rs670139 (meta- $P=1.4\times 10^{-9}$). When combining GERAD+ and ADGC results (after removing overlapping samples) *ABCA7* has a P -value of 5.0×10^{-21} (OR=1.22). The two SNPs at the *MS4A* gene cluster, rs610932 and rs670139, showed P -values of 1.2×10^{-16} (OR=0.91) and 1.1×10^{-10} (OR=1.08), respectively, in the combined analysis of GERAD+ and ADGC results. It is noteworthy that the most significant ADGC SNP at the *MS4A* locus is in LD with our top SNP (rs4938933 with rs610932 $r^2=0.62$, $D'=0.86$), thus both datasets may be detecting the same underlying signal.

This study also provides additional independent support for association with *CR1* (Stage 2 $P=1.4\times 10^{-3}$) and *BIN1* (Stage 2 $P=3.8\times 10^{-5}$; see Table 1 for meta-analysis.) We did not observe interaction between *APOE* and the novel variants identified in this study, indeed we did not find evidence of epistasis between any of the genome-wide significant variants identified to date (*ABCA7*, *MS4A*, *BIN1*, *CR1*, *PICALM*, *CLU* or *APOE*) (see Supplementary Table 4a). Likewise, adjusting for the presence of at least one *APOE* $\epsilon 4$ allele had little effect on the results of analysis of the three novel variants (see Supplementary Table 4b). We also found no evidence for association between these loci and age at onset of AD (rs3764650: $P=0.17$; rs670139: $P=0.38$; rs610932: $P=0.95$; rs744373: $P=0.87$; rs3818361: $P=0.58$).

This study therefore shows strong statistical support for two novel AD risk loci, which replicate over a number of independent case-control samples. The first of these is the ATP-binding cassette, sub-family A, member 7 (*ABCA7*) locus (Figure 2A). The associated marker is rs3764650, which is located in intron 13. This SNP was the only variant in the gene that passed our Stage 1 criterion, which is not unexpected given the low levels of linkage disequilibrium (LD) between this SNP and others included in the GWAS. However, in a preliminary attempt to identify an associated functional variant at the *ABCA7* locus, we genotyped the GERAD2 sample for rs3752246, a non-synonymous SNP in exon 32 of the gene, which showed the highest LD with rs3764650 out of all HapMap *ABCA7* coding variants based on r^2 ($r^2=0.36$, $D'=0.89$). This variant (which was not genotyped in Stage 1) was also associated with AD (GERAD2 $P=1\times 10^{-3}$, OR=1.17). Rs3752246 encodes a glycine to alanine substitution at position 1527 of the protein (accession number NP_061985.2) which is predicted to be a benign change¹⁶, and is unlikely to be the relevant functional variant. We used data from two published expression quantitative trait loci (eQTL) datasets (derived from lymphoblastoid cell lines¹⁷ and brain¹⁸) to determine if

rs3764650 is associated with the expression of *ABCA7*. However, no association was observed (see Supplementary Table 5). Further work will be required to identify the causal variant(s) at this locus.

Second, we implicate the membrane-spanning 4A (*MS4A*) gene cluster (Figure 2B). The association spans an LD block of 293 kb (chr11: 59,814,28760,107,105) and includes 6 of 16 known genes comprising the membrane-spanning 4-domains, subfamily A (*MS4A*). These are *MS4A2*, *MS4A3*, *MS4A4A*, *MS4A4E*, *MS4A6A* and *MS4A6E*. The associated SNPs are found in the 3' UTR of *MS4A6A* (rs610932) and the intergenic region between *MS4A4E* and *MS4A6A* (rs670139). rs610932 shows nominally significant association with expression levels of *MS4A6A* in cerebellum and temporal cortex ($0.01 < P < 0.05$; see Supplementary Table 5), but not in frontal cortex, pons, or lymphoblastoid cell lines. The non-synonymous SNP that is most strongly associated with the genome-wide significant variants is rs2304933. This SNP was analyzed in Stage 1 but showed weaker evidence for association ($P=0.006$) than the genome-wide significant variant at this locus in the same sample.

We also sought to follow up four additional loci showing suggestive evidence for association with AD ($1 \times 10^{-6} > P > 5 \times 10^{-8}$) from the ADGC GWAS¹². These loci included *CD33*, *EPHA1*, *CD2AP* and *ARID5B*. It should be noted that evidence for suggestive association with *EPHA1* and *CD33* has been reported previously. Members of this collaboration were the first to report *EPHA1* as showing suggestive evidence of association with AD (rs11771145, $P=1.7 \times 10^{-6}$; LD with ADGC SNP rs11767557: $r^2 = 0.28$, $D' = 0.75$)¹¹, which included GERAD1 and EADI1 samples reported on here. Similarly, Bertram and colleagues were the first to show suggestive evidence for *CD33* (rs3826656, $P=4.0 \times 10^{-6}$; LD with ADGC SNP rs3865444: $r^2 = 0.13$, $D' = 1.0$)¹⁹.

We combined data from the GERAD+ dataset comprising GERAD1, EADI1, deCODE and AD-IG GWAS datasets (up to 6992 cases and 13472 controls) using inverse variance meta-analysis. The TGEN1, ADNI and Mayo1 datasets were included in the ADGC discovery set and were thus excluded from these particular analyses. We observed support for association with *CD2AP* (rs9349407, $P=8.0 \times 10^{-4}$, OR=1.11), *CD33* (rs3865444, $P=2.2 \times 10^{-4}$, OR=0.89) and *EPHA1* (rs11767557, $P=3.4 \times 10^{-4}$, OR=0.90).

When these data were combined with ADGC we observed genome-wide evidence for association with AD (rs9349407, GERAD+ & ADGC meta- $P=8.6 \times 10^{-9}$, OR=1.11; rs3865444, GERAD+ & ADGC meta- $P=1.6 \times 10^{-9}$, OR=0.91; rs11767557, GERAD+ & ADGC meta- $P=6.0 \times 10^{-10}$, OR=0.90). We observed nominally significant evidence of association with *ARID5B* (rs2588969, $P=3.3 \times 10^{-2}$, OR=1.06), however the direction of effect was opposite to that reported by ADGC¹², and was not significant overall (GERAD+ & ADGC meta- $P=3.6 \times 10^{-1}$, OR=0.99). See Table 2 for results and Supplementary Table 6 for results of additional SNPs at these loci.

Taken together, these results show compelling evidence for an additional five novel AD susceptibility loci. *ABCA7* encodes an ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporter. The ABC transporter superfamily has roles in transporting a wide range of substrates across cell membranes²⁰ *ABCA7* is highly expressed in brain, particularly in hippocampal CA1 neurons²¹ and in microglia²². *ABCA7* is involved in the efflux of lipids from cells to lipoprotein particles. Notably, the main lipoproteins in brain are APOE followed by CLU. Although no evidence for epistatic interactions between the three genetic loci was observed (see Supplementary Table 4a), however, this is not a prerequisite for biological interaction between these molecules. In addition, *ABCA7* has been shown to regulate APP processing and inhibit β -amyloid secretion in cultured cells overexpressing APP²³. *ABCA7*

also modulates phagocytosis of apoptotic cells by macrophages mediated through the C1q complement receptor protein on the apoptotic cell surface²³. *ABCA7* is an orthologue of *C. elegans ced-7*, the product of which is known to clear apoptotic cells and the high levels of expression of *ABCA7* in microglia are consistent with such a role.

The genes in the *MS4A* cluster on chromosome 11 have a common genomic structure with all other members of the family, including transmembrane domains indicating that they are likely to be part of a family of cell surface proteins²⁴. *MS4A2* encodes the beta subunit of high affinity IgE receptors²⁵. The remaining genes in the LD block have no known specific functions. *CD33* is a member of the sialic-acid-binding immunoglobulin-like lectins (Siglec) family which are thought to promote cell-cell interactions and regulate functions of cells in the innate and adaptive immune systems²⁶. Most members of the Siglec family, including *CD33*, act as endocytic receptors, mediating endocytosis through a mechanism independent of clathrin²⁷. *CD2AP* (CD2-associated protein) is a scaffold/adaptor protein²⁸ which associates with cortactin, a protein also involved in the regulation of receptor mediated endocytosis²⁹. It is striking that these two new susceptibility genes for AD, and the recently established susceptibility genes *PICALM* and *BIN1* are all implicated in cell-cell communication and transduction of molecules across the membrane. *EPHA1* is a member of the ephrin receptor subfamily. Ephrins and Eph receptors are membrane bound proteins which play roles in cell and axon guidance³⁰ and in synaptic development and plasticity³¹. However EphA1 is expressed mainly in epithelial tissues³² where it regulates cell morphology and motility³³. Additional roles in apoptosis³⁴ and inflammation³⁵ have also been proposed.

Our study has generated strong statistical evidence that variants at *ABCA7* and the *MS4A* gene cluster confer susceptibility to AD, which replicates over a number of independent case control samples. We also provide independent support for three loci showing suggestive evidence in a companion paper¹², *CD33*, *CD2AP* and *EPHA1*, which when the data are combined show genome-wide levels of significance. Finally, we provide further evidence for *BIN1* and *CR1* loci as susceptibility loci. What is striking about our findings is the emerging consistency in putative function of the genes identified. Five of the recently identified AD susceptibility loci *CLU*, *CR1*, *ABCA7*, *CD33* and *EPHA1* have putative functions in the immune system; *PICALM*, *BIN1*, *CD33*, *CD2AP* are involved in processes at the cell membrane, including endocytosis and *APOE*, *CLU* and *ABCA7* in lipid processing. It is conceivable that these processes would play strong roles in neurodegeneration and A β clearance from the brain. These findings therefore provide new impetus for focused studies aimed at understanding the pathogenesis of AD.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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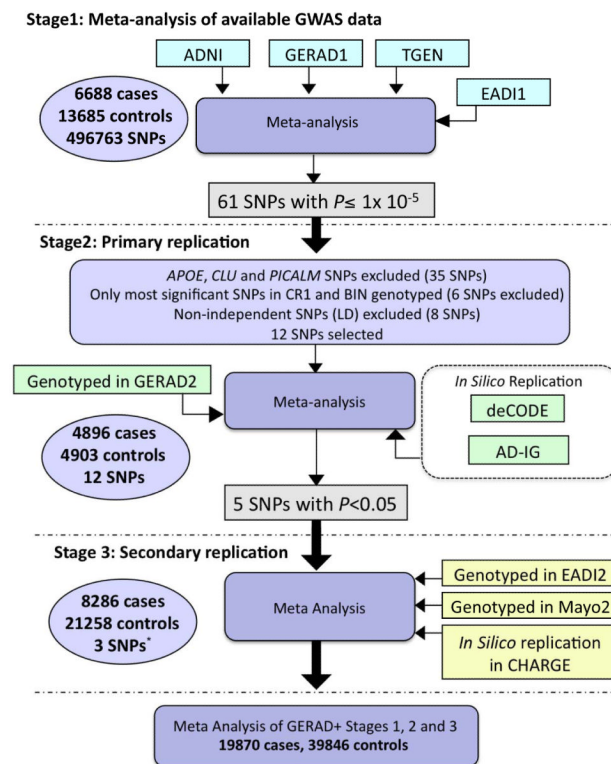
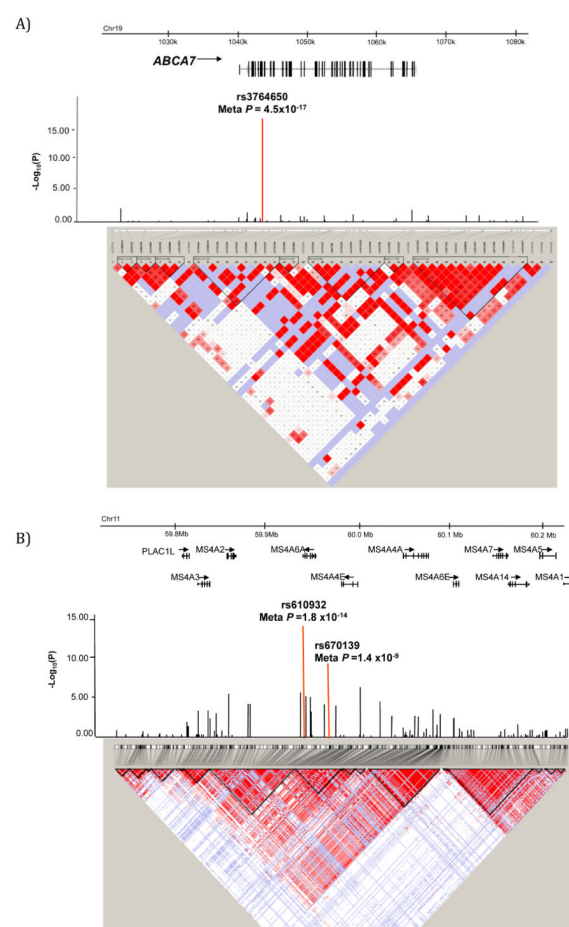


Figure 1.
 GERAD+ study design.

* Data for rs744373 and rs3818361 in the CHARGE consortium have been presented elsewhere¹⁵, as has data for rs381861 in the EADI2 samples⁴, as such these SNPs were not included in Stage 3.

**Figure 2.**

Schematic of the associated variants reported in reference to (A) the *ABCA7* gene and (B) chromosomal region chr11:59.81Mb-60.1Mb harboring members of the *MS4A* gene cluster. Chromosome positions are shown at the top of the schematics (UCSC Feb 2009). Gene schematic: horizontal arrows indicate directions of transcription, black boxes indicate gene exons/UTR. The $-\log_{10}(P)$ of the SNPs analyzed in Stage 1 are shown in chart graph. The GERAD+ Stage 1, 2 and 3 meta-analysis P -values for SNPs rs3764650 (*ABCA7*), rs610932 (*MS4A6A*) and rs670139 (*MS4A4E*) are indicated by the red lines. The D' LD block structure of the *ABCA7* gene plus surrounding region, and chr11:59.81Mb-60.1Mb according to the CEPH HapMap data, are provided at the bottom of each schematic with lines indicating where each SNP genotyped on the Illumina 610-quadrant chip is represented.

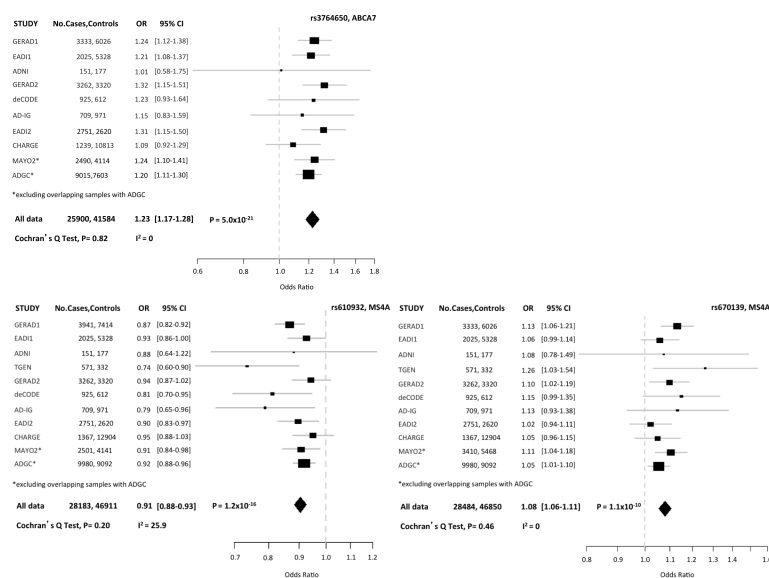


Figure 3. Forest plots showing association in the different datasets for SNPs at the *ABCA7* (rs3764650) and *MS4A* (rs610932 & rs670139) loci.

Table 1

Results of the GERAD+ study.

SNP	Closest Gene	CHR	MAF	Stage 1 [*]			Stage 2 [†]			Stage 3 [‡]			Meta-analysis of GERAD+ Stage 1, 2 and 3 [§]			Meta-analysis of GERAD+ & ADGC		
				P	OR	95% CI	P	OR	95% CI	P	OR	95% CI	P	OR	95% CI	P	OR	95% CI
rs3764650	<i>ABCA7</i>	19	0.10	2.6×10 ⁻⁷	1.22	1.13-1.32	1.9×10 ⁻⁵	1.28	1.14-1.44	2.9×10 ⁻⁷	1.22	1.13-1.32	4.5×10 ⁻¹⁷	1.23	1.18-1.30	5.0×10 ⁻²¹	1.23	1.17-1.28
rs610932	<i>MS4A6A</i>	11	0.42	1.8×10 ⁻⁸	0.88	0.85-0.92	1.6×10 ⁻³	0.90	0.84-0.96	2.1×10 ⁻⁵	0.91	0.87-0.95	1.8×10 ⁻¹⁴	0.90	0.87-0.92	1.2×10 ⁻¹⁶	0.91	0.88-0.93
rs670139	<i>MS4A4E</i>	11	0.41	1.0×10 ⁻⁵	1.11	1.06-1.16	1.1×10 ⁻³	1.11	1.04-1.19	3.2×10 ⁻³	1.06	1.02-1.11	1.4×10 ⁻⁹	1.09	1.06-1.12	1.1×10 ⁻¹⁰	1.08	1.06-1.11
rs3818361	<i>CR1</i>	1	0.19	3.2×10 ⁻¹²	1.21	1.14-1.27	1.4×10 ⁻³	1.14	1.05-1.23	NA	NA	NA	3.7×10 ⁻¹⁴	1.18	1.13-1.24	NA	NA	NA
rs744373	<i>BIN1</i>	2	0.29	1.5×10 ⁻¹⁰	1.17	1.11-1.22	3.8×10 ⁻⁵	1.17	1.08-1.25	NA	NA	NA	2.6×10 ⁻¹⁴	1.17	1.12-1.21	NA	NA	NA

CHR=Chromosome, MAF=Minor Allele Frequency in cases and controls.

^{*} GERAD1, EAD11, ADNI, & TGEN1 <6688 Cases, 13685 Controls.[†] GERAD2, deCODE, AD-IG: 4896 AD Cases, 4903 Controls.[‡] EAD12, CHARGE, Mayo2 <8286 AD Cases, 21258 Controls.[§] GERAD1&2, EAD11&2, ADNI, TGEN1, Decode, AD-IG, CHARGE, Mayo2 <19870 AD Cases and 39846 Controls

Table 2

Results of the combined analysis of the ADGC and GERAD+ consortia.

SNP	Closest Gene	CHR	MAF	Linkage Disequilibrium with the top ADGC SNP at each loci		GERAD+ Consortia *				GERAD+ & ADGC Metaanalysis			
				r ²	D'	Cases	Controls	P	OR	95% CI	P	OR	95% CI
rs9349407 [†]	<i>CD2AP</i>	6	0.29	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	8.0×10 ⁻⁴	1.11	1.04-1.18	8.6×10 ⁻⁹	1.11	1.07-1.15
rs9296559 [‡]	<i>CD2AP</i>	6	0.29	0.71	0.95	6283	7165	1.5×10 ⁻³	1.10	1.04-1.17	NA	NA	NA
rs11767557	<i>EPHA1</i>	7	0.21	N/A	N/A	6283	12935	3.4×10 ⁻⁴	0.90	0.85-0.95	6.0×10 ⁻¹⁰	0.90	0.86-0.93
rs2588969 [‡]	<i>ARID5B</i>	10	0.40	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	3.3×10 ⁻²	1.06 [‡]	1.01-1.13	3.6 × 10 ⁻¹	0.99	0.95-1.02
rs4948288	<i>ARID5B</i>	10	0.26	0.55	0.78	6992	13472	3.6×10 ⁻³	1.07 [‡]	1.03-1.15	NA	NA	NA
rs3865444 [§]	<i>CD33</i>	19	0.31	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	2.2×10 ⁻⁴	0.89	0.84-0.95	1.6 × 10 ⁻⁹	0.91	0.88-0.93

CHR=Chromosome, MAF=Minor Allele Frequency in cases and controls.

* GERAD1, EADI1, deCODE, AD-IG.

[†] results generated from imputed data. The results from the top genotyped SNP are also shown. See Supplementary Table 6 for full details.

[‡] opposite direction of effect to that reported by Naj et al.

[§] data imputed in the deCODE dataset.